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## Smith Wildman Brookhart: Iowa's Renegade Republican

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in their programs. Farmland preservation moved one more step closer to reality with the passage of the 1985 Farm Bill, which contained provisions such as the Conservation Reserve Program, "swampbuster" and "sodbuster" restrictions, and conservation compliance.

Lehman does a commendable job in bringing the overall land preservation story to life. Thus *Public Values, Private Lands* is necessary reading for both rural and urban midwesterners, because our greatest resource besides people is the land itself.

*Smith Wildman Brookhart: Iowa's Renegade Republican*, by George William McDaniel. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995. xviii, 378 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PETER L. PETERSEN, WEST TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY

In this sympathetic but far from uncritical chronicle of the life of Smith Wildman Brookhart (1869–1944), George McDaniel has made a major contribution to Iowa history and biography. In the history of Iowa politics, few individuals were as colorful or controversial as Smith Brookhart, one of the Senate's "sons of the wild jackass" in the 1920s. He won his first office, that of Washington County Attorney, in 1894. Initially a "regular" Republican, Brookhart's admiration for Theodore Roosevelt and Albert Baird Cummins led him toward the "progressive" wing of the party. Over time Brookhart came to see himself as the champion of farmers, small-town merchants, and laborers and proudly proclaimed that he "would rather be right than be regular." His views often brought him into conflict with the Republican establishment, particularly during the 1920s, when Iowa politics, McDaniel argues, "was largely characterized by the struggle between the regular Republican Party and Smith Brookhart for the support of Iowans" (xvii). In many ways, McDaniel's account of that fight is the most valuable part of the book, as he details how this internecine conflict led to Brookhart's defeat in 1924 by Daniel Steck, the first Democrat to represent Iowa in the United States Senate since the end of George Wallace Jones's term in 1859.

An angry Brookhart soon had his revenge, however. After defeating Cummins, his one-time hero and ally, in the 1926 Republican primary and Democrat Claude R. Porter in the general election, he triumphantly returned to Washington, "the chosen voice of agrarian protest" (198). For a time he cooperated with Herbert Hoover, but Brookhart soon broke with his fellow Iowan over the issue of agricultural relief and eventually supported Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1932 presidential election. By then, many depression-weary Iowans had grown

tired of Brookhart's lack of legislative success, and he was soundly defeated in the Republican primary by Henry Field, a Shenandoah nurseryman and radio broadcaster. A campaign to return to the Senate as an independent evoked little support. Roosevelt then appointed him as a special trade adviser in the New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Administration, but true to character, Brookhart soon began to criticize AAA programs, particularly those calling for production controls. Early in 1935 his position was "eliminated," thus ending a remarkable political career spanning more than four decades.

McDaniel believes those who called the Iowan a socialist, a Bolshevik, or even a buffoon were wrong. Brookhart's political views were not radical but rather based on "an abiding populism," a desire to replace competition with cooperation. Thus he urged small businessmen to fight the spread of chain stores in the 1920s by forming cooperatives similar to those he advocated for farmers. But such convictions, particularly during the 1920s and early 1930s, ran counter to the prevailing trends toward modernization, whether through the associationalist ideas of Hoover or Roosevelt's statist solutions. Moreover, McDaniel opines that "lack of political skills" limited Brookhart's legislative success. He was not a coalition builder or compromiser, and thus found it hard to translate his often overblown rhetoric into acceptable programs. It is one thing to blame Wall Street or the Federal Reserve Board for many of the nation's economic troubles, but it is quite another to bring about legislative remedies. Brookhart was a lightning rod for many of Iowa's discontented citizens, but ultimately they sought others to lead their causes.

Although political activities form the core of this book, McDaniel does not ignore other aspects of his subject's life. Rifle shooting was a passion for Brookhart, and his ability to teach others to shoot gained him national recognition, including a term as president of the National Rifle Association. He played such a prominent role in training marksmen during World War I that years later newspapers still referred to him as the "man who taught the army how to shoot."

McDaniel's research on Brookhart, which began in 1976, is imposing. Because his subject left little in the way of personal papers, the author was forced to rely on oral history, newspapers, government records, and an impressive number of manuscript collections in widely scattered repositories. Anyone interested in Iowa political history from the 1890s to the 1930s will want to look at McDaniel's notes and bibliography. A number of photographs and cartoons grace the well-written text. In sum, this is an important book, one worthy of adding to all of Iowa's libraries.

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